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Servant Leadership

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Servant Leadership Paper

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Lead: 326 Exploration of Leadership

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ABSTRACT

I have had the privilege of being a Celebrate Recovery Leader for five years now. I lead a group of women through a class that is about nine to twelve months long and in that time frame, I get to witness a beautiful transition right before my eyes. Women, typically, attend this class because they are struggling with a hurt, habit, or hang up and the light in their eyes has been snuffed out by life's challenges and they forgot their passion in life. But after attending this class for about six months, they begin to recognize their value and discover their self-worth. What I learned by attending leadership courses at Boise State University is that my style of leading is called 'Servant Leadership', and I have been hooked ever since. This paper intends to define servant leadership, discuss the traits of servant leadership, and how I have embraced this style of leadership in my life experiences. This paper also describes how that leadership style has impacted my involvement with the community projects for obtaining the LEAD Certificate at Boise State University.

Keywords: servant leadership, authentic

Introduction

I have had the privilege of being a Celebrate Recovery Leader for five years now. I use the servant leadership style as I lead this group of women through a class that is about nine to twelve months long and in that time frame, I get to witness a beautiful transition right before my eyes. Women, typically, start this class wearing sweats, no make-up, their hair in a pony-tail, and a non-existent self-esteem. After attending my class for about six months, they start showing up with their hair curled, make-up on, and excitedly share a story about how they stood up for themselves that week. The light in their eyes that had been snuffed out by life's challenges, has begun to flicker once again. My aim is always to fan that little flame till it is a roaring fire and that woman discovers her worth and value. What I learned by attending leadership courses was that my way of leading this class was called 'Servant Leadership', and I have been hooked ever since. This paper intends to define servant leadership, how I have embraced this style of leadership in my group projects, and my description of how that leadership style impacted my involvement with the community project.

Servant Leadership

Unlike any other leadership styles, there may be 'ripple effects' to servant leadership that has positive impacts beyond the individuals that have direct contact with that leader (Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu & Wayne, 2014). No other leadership approach impresses the idea of propagating the leader's behaviors through followers as does servant leadership. (Greenleaf, 1977).

James Autry (2001), states that followers only know about our character, personhood, and our spirit by our behavior in the workplace. They cannot see in our heads, so they don't

know what we think, feel or detect our compassion, the pain or joy, they will only know all of that through manifestations of our acts of service.

Autry (2001) suggests five ways that assist us with having an attitude of service in our leadership. The first is being authentic. Being authentic is first knowing yourself, then being yourself. He gives the illustration that when we were children, our parents taught us not to say everything we speak, we carry that with us into adulthood and learn to manipulate the way people see us. Being authentic, is about learning to show our true selves which leads to his next suggested trait, vulnerability.

Being vulnerable requires having courage, which can feel like a paradox. Autry, (2001) explains that being vulnerable means being honest with your feelings; being open about doubts and fears and concerns about employees, the company or ideas. Embracing when you made a mistake and admitting it. Being vulnerable requires us to be courageous because you have to let go of control.

The next trait is being accepting. Autry believes that acceptance is more important than approval. He states that acceptance does not mean that you accept everyone's ideas without analysis but only that one accepts the ideas as valid for discussion and it's important to focus on the idea and not the person that presented it.

Another trait that is critical for servant leadership is being present. That means having yourself available at all times. We've all talked to someone that is mentally distracted and we can feel as if we weren't important. This trait is showing individuals that you are listening and that you care what they have to say at that very moment.

The last trait of a servant leader Autry lists is to be useful. This means that we are a resource for our followers. He claims that one of the primary functions of a leader is to ensure that people get the resources they need to be successful. Leaders must be their principal resource. Autry (2001) explains that leadership is not about controlling people; it's about caring for people and being useful resource for people. It is less concerned with pep talks and more concerned with helping individuals find meaning in their work and create an environment where they can bring their spirits to work (Autry, 2001). True power comes from the people that give it based on trust and support which is why I have embraced this leadership style.

Evidence of the Leadership Style Embraced

As our group was forming, I was authentic and encouraged authenticity in each group member. I was really glad we had done the exercise in class that helped us determine what our strengths were. That helped us identify tasks and assign duties that would be a good fit for those strengths. This group exercise reminded me that we all bring different strengths to the table and by having the *accepting* trait in servant leadership, we could utilize each one of those strengths. When our group met at a coffee shop to decide our topic and discuss our plan of action, I asked everyone what they '*wanted*' to do. I knew each group member would feel more fulfilled doing what they were good at and our overall group project would be more successful.

Secondly, I encouraged and probed for more ideas and creativity from each one of them. I remember one instance in particular where I could tell we were losing interest from one of the group members and I drew her back in by asking her opinion on matters. When she contributed something positive, I gave her a lot of praise. Her withdrawal could've only been noticed if I were *fully present*. We edited the movie together and she really blossomed with her ideas and input. And at the same time, I wasn't afraid to override decisions that I didn't think were good

ones. For instance at the studio, the group had put folding chairs and a long rough looking plastic table in front of them. I told them we had to make the set look more professional. Once we got it set up and the camera was on them, I told them how great they looked and how well they were doing.

An area that I have for improvement with this leadership style is “*Foresight.*” Foresight refers to the leader’s ability to know the future and attempt to predict what is coming. I am very much in the present and would love to be more of a visionary when it comes to work. At times, it’s hard not to just focus on what the ‘to-do’s’ of the day to get work done or a project done. If I look too far ahead, I can become anxious. So I am more prone to want to look at process improvements and develop individuals than looking at the future, that is my weakness.

Description of working in the community

When I met with the employees from St. Luke’s Children’s Hospital, I was humbled by their willingness to just help us complete a school project. But when we showed up to interview them, they were so excited about being selected for our project which encouraged me to want to serve them well and represent them in the best possible light for our television program. To thank them for their participation, I brought them two Starbuck’s gift cards, one for themselves and another for a friend or their ‘Miracle Child’.

I had to be *vulnerable* when we had a technical difficulties at the first interview, and that technical difficulty was me forgetting to turn on the microphone. I had made a mistake that inconvenienced not only myself and a classmate but the employees of St. Luke’s. I had to handle that situation with grace and humility as I had to walk back in the office and explain what I had done.

I believe my leadership style affected the community in a way that this major company would feel good about helping students and would feel appreciated by receiving a small ‘thank you’ gift. They will hopefully will feel the effects from a positive television program that highlights them and gives them kudos for treating our local kids. We mention in the video how lucky our community is to have a children’s hospital right here in the Treasure Valley so families don’t have to travel to get help for their sick children.

Writing a small book about little girls being able to be leaders that I donated to our local library encouraged me to want to write additional books that will encourage and inspire small children to dream big and find their value. In doing so, I would like to continue to donate books to our community partners.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the traits that help enforce servant leadership, evidence of how I have embraced these traits, and how my leadership impacted the community.

In conclusion, the impact this leadership style has had on my self-evaluation is that it reminds me why I love this style so much. I really didn’t consciously think of these things at the time or do all of these things on purpose. I didn’t really even think much of it at the time but as we were working on our poster and reviewing our hard work; a couple of the group member’s said, “You really are encouraging.” They said the encouragement made them feel good when I told them how good their book was, as I stood on the set encouraging them that they looked good on camera. I encouraged them to speak with confidence and that what they were saying and doing was important. They trusted me during this process. I felt good that we not only did a couple of projects we could be proud of but it fed our souls as well. People call this style, a

‘warm fuzzy style’ or ‘too soft of a style’ and have even called it ‘easy’, but I assure you, it is not easy. It doesn’t mean there isn’t conflict, or that a servant leader never has to tackle serious challenges, they do. It can take more time than other leadership styles and maybe even more energy, but the followers, employees, are more loyal, more fulfilled, and more creative.

This reflection has reminded me that I don’t have to be afraid of my weaknesses, or embarrassed about mistakes, this style of leadership is encouraging, compassionate and promotes personal growth which will ultimately draws out an individual’s full potential and fans their flame.

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